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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 36th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 10 April 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:	Mr. SIMKHADA	(Nepal)
later:	Mr. JAKUBOWSKI (Vice-Chairman)	(Poland)
later:	Mr. SIMKHADA (Chairman)	(Nepal)

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GE.00-12531 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

(a) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (agenda item 12) (continued) (E/CN.4/2000/66, 67, 68 and Add. 1-5, /115, /128 and 131; E/CN.4/2000/118-E/CN.6/2000/8; E/CN.4/2000/NGO/42, 56, 65, 87 and 119; E/CN.6/2000/6; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/14)

1. Ms. ECKEY (Norway) said that her delegation hoped there would be extensive and speedy ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which promised to be an important human rights instrument. It also called on the States parties to withdraw any reservations to the Convention that were contrary to its object and purpose.

2. Genuine democracy could not be achieved without the active and equal participation of women and men. Norway was trying to close the gap, partly through legislation and partly by encouraging voluntary action to increase women's participation in public life. The Gender Equality Act, for example, had used affirmative action to bring women from diverse backgrounds into politics and onto public committees, thereby strengthening democracy and improving the use of human resources. Women had also added new topics to the political agenda, including the issues of violence and the organization of paid and unpaid work. That, in turn, had had an impact on policy.

3. Civil society, particularly in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), had also made significant contributions to the enhancement of democracy. In that context, the follow-up to the Declaration on human rights defenders was of great importance.

4. Her delegation was pleased to note that human rights mechanisms, including the Commission, were increasingly incorporating the gender perspective in their work. The forthcoming follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women would be an opportunity to assess what remained to be done to advance women's rights. Women themselves had a vital role to play in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and must intensify their efforts if they were to move from platform to action.

5. Ms. RUECKER (Canada) said that the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which would permit the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to consider individual complaints, had fulfilled the commitments made by Governments in Beijing. Two other significant milestones had been the adoption by the Human Rights Committee of its general comment No. 28, requiring States parties to ensure the equal right of women and men to the enjoyment of the rights set forth in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court, whose Statute included a detailed list of sexual and gender-related crimes. Legislation had recently been tabled in her country to allow for full implementation of the Statute.

6. The problem of trafficking in women presented a complex challenge to all countries and her delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's identification of trafficking as a priority

theme. It encouraged all Governments to intensify negotiations on the draft protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in women and children, supplementing the draft United Nations convention against transnational organized crime.

7. The field missions undertaken by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and other special rapporteurs were of great importance. The Commission must remain committed to the continuation of their work and her delegation would be calling for an extension of the Special Rapporteur's mandate.

8. Her delegation was encouraged by the increasing collaboration between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights, and urged all relevant actors to implement the recommendations of the joint workshop held in May 1999 on gender integration into the human rights system.

9. The successful integration of the gender perspective was still hampered by an absence of gender-specific information and sex-disaggregated data. Governments could help redress the gender balance in United Nations activities by including more women in their delegations and identifying more women as candidates for United Nations posts.

10. Ms. COOMARASWAMY (Special Rapporteur on violence against women), introducing her report (E/CN.4/2000/68 and Add. 1-5), said that the single most dramatic development of 1999 had been the increase in the reporting of honour killings. The crime was an ancient one, based on the assumption that a woman's behaviour reflected on the family and the community. It was the most intimate of all crimes, since it was a woman's own family members who executed her in cold blood.

11. Many States had not taken firm action against such extrajudicial killings. Countries that failed to recognize the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women violated international standards and those that allowed violence towards women who were exercising their right of choice were flagrantly violating the rule of law and encouraging impunity for the perpetrators.

12. Her main report focused, however, on the issue of the trafficking of women. The debate thereon had been confused by the existence of two schools of thought - one that emphasized the objectives of trafficking and another that focused on the process of trafficking, regardless of its purpose. The second approach appeared to be the more effective, in that it made a distinction between migration, which was a choice, and trafficking, which was non-consensual. What the international community must prevent was the involuntary passage of people across boundaries and she was concerned that immigration and law-enforcement officers, rather than human rights defenders, had taken the lead in defining the terms of the debate on trafficking.

13. She hoped that her report would contribute to the discussion on the definition of trafficking, as the non-consensual crossing of borders by individuals. She was concerned, however, at the apparent link between restrictive immigration policies and the trafficking phenomenon. Such policies played into traffickers' hands by marginalizing women who were already vulnerable. Where there was scope for legal migrant work, the necessity for illegal migrant work diminished.

14. Trafficked women were frequently treated as illegal immigrants rather than as victims of a crime, who deserved understanding and support. The threat of jail and deportation made them fearful of approaching the authorities. A more enlightened approach, such as the one adopted in Belgium, would allow them to remain in the country, supported by women's groups, in order to testify in cases of trafficking. Her report examined human rights-based strategies that could be used in addressing the issue.

15. An addendum to the main report dealt with violence and hardship experienced by women as a result of the economic and social policies adopted by States, often pursuant to advice from international financial institutions (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.5). The report was not a critique of economic development but an appeal for countries to take economic and social rights as seriously as political and civil ones.

16. Of her four field visits in 1999, the one that had shocked her the most was her mission to Afghanistan (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.4). She had found official, widespread and systematic discrimination against women, exacerbated by poverty and war. Inhuman edicts against women were enforced through physical violence by members of the Department of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice. Women were denied the right to education, health and work, and freedom of movement or association. She had been told that things were improving, but the changes were paltry and the international community must do all it could to ensure that the authorities in Afghanistan observed minimum standards of women's human rights.

17. She had also visited Cuba, at the Cuban Government's invitation, and had been impressed by the situation there. Her report (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.2) attempted to enter into a constructive dialogue on approaches to violence against women. She had also been concerned about arbitrary detention and civil and political rights. Her report also requested further international investigation of the United States embargo, which appeared to violate the economic and social rights of Cubans.

18. She had therefore been amazed and saddened by the Cuban Government's reaction to the report, a reaction that was quite disproportionate to the criticism it contained. The attack on members of the secretariat and the procurement of confidential internal documents was quite unprecedented and quite unwarranted. She stood by the integrity of her assistants and took full responsibility for the report.

19. In Haiti, she had met women's organizations and victims of political violence (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.3). It was important that an international presence should remain in Haiti until the country's own police force was fully trained. She hoped that the Government would implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, punish the perpetrators of human rights violations, such as the political rapes that had taken place under the Cedras regime, and compensate the victims.

20. Lastly, she paid tribute to her late colleague, Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, an internationally-renowned human rights activist who had been killed by a suicide bomber in 1999. A tireless crusader for non-violence, he had actively supported her in carrying out her mandate.

His death was a stark reminder of the importance of protecting human rights defenders, whose activities contributed to the very essence of the Commission's work. She urged the Commission, therefore, to adopt the draft resolution on the protection of human rights defenders.

21. Ms. de ARMAS GARCIA (Cuba) said that her delegation wished all the members of the Commission to understand the circumstances surrounding the Special Rapporteur's mission to Cuba.

22. Referring to the comments by her Government on the Special Rapporteur's report on her visit to Cuba (E/CN.4/2000/131), she said that the United States Government had attempted to obstruct visits to Cuba by Commission special rapporteurs and, when such visits had taken place, to influence the outcome, using various means including behind-the-scenes manipulations within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in blatant violation of the neutrality and respect for the independence of the thematic mechanisms that was expected of the Secretariat.

23. The fact that the first version of the report had been submitted to the Cuban authorities only after a six-month delay, and when it was on the point of publication, had given the Government further cause for concern.

24. The Special Rapporteur had been given full access to all information sources and to the highest authorities, yet she appeared to have given more credence to external reports, without further documentation or verification on the ground. The Government of Cuba totally rejected the contents of paragraphs 9, 14, 66, 67, 79, 95 and 104 of the report as based on false information or ideological positions that elevated the liberal democratic bourgeois view of human rights to a universal truth.

25. Nevertheless the report acknowledged the progress achieved by Cuban women as a result of the 1959 revolution and noted the impact of the United States' economic, financial and trade embargo on Cuba, which amounted to a kind of ongoing violence against Cuban women and a gross violation of all their rights. The report had failed to consider, however, other kinds of violence against Cuban women, such as the hostile policies of successive Governments of the United States that had resulted in the death and permanent disability of hundreds of Cuban women of all ages.

26. In developing its policies, programmes and legislation for the advancement of women, Cuba would take account of those comments and recommendations in the report that referred to objective problems, and of the legitimate suggestions made by the Special Rapporteur.

27. Mr. ANTONIO (Observer for Haiti) said that his delegation wished to thank the Special Rapporteur on violence against women for her visit to Haiti and for her report (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.3), which was both clear and objective.

28. As the Special Rapporteur had stressed, the situation of women in Haiti must be improved in terms of both new legislation and the implementation of existing laws. Efforts were being made, in cooperation with women's associations, but much remained to be done, above all

with regard to the training of civil servants. His Government had noted the Special Rapporteur's observations and recommendations and would take them into account in its work to improve the situation of women and girl children.

29. Ms. ARCA (Rapporteur of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) said that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been adopted 20 years previously, and it was gratifying to observe the steady increase in the numbers of States that had ratified it or acceded to it. She urged the remaining 27 countries to do so without delay, so that the goal of universal ratification could be achieved by the end of 2000.

30. The Convention continued to be subject to a large number of reservations but progress was being made in that regard. The General Assembly had reiterated the call for States to limit the extent of any reservations to the Convention and ensure that no reservation was incompatible with international treaty law. It had also urged the States parties to review reservations regularly, with a view to their withdrawal. In fact, a number of States parties had withdrawn or limited their original reservations to the Convention.

31. To date, 34 States parties had signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The Optional Protocol established two procedures: an individual communications procedure and an inquiry procedure. The former allowed anyone claiming to be the victim of a violation of any of the rights in the Convention to submit a petition, while the latter allowed the Committee to institute inquiries into such violations by a State party. No reservations to the Protocol were permissible, although it was possible to opt out of the inquiry procedure.

32. The Optional Protocol represented a careful balance between comparable communications and inquiry procedures and new developments in international law. It had introduced a number of innovations, such as in articles 11 and 13, which required States parties to ensure that individuals under their jurisdiction were not subjected to ill-treatment or intimidation as a consequence of communicating with the Committee.

33. It was expected that the number of ratifications needed for the Protocol's entry into force would soon be reached. Its entry into force would impose major new responsibilities on the Committee, but would provide an international remedy for violations of human rights and encourage Governments to examine the means of redress that were available to women at the domestic level, the latter being regarded as the most important contribution it would make.

34. The Committee's relationship with OHCHR and the human rights mechanisms had continued to strengthen. It was pleased to note that gender concerns were increasingly reflected in the work of the human rights mechanisms, and had welcomed the recent adoption by both the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of general comments on women's enjoyment of the rights monitored by those bodies. She wished to highlight the Committee's interest in the forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: the negative impact of discrimination against women on the grounds of race as well as sex had become increasingly apparent. The Committee had therefore determined that it would follow closely the preparatory process for the Conference.

35. The Committee was entering an important new phase in its development. Since 1997, it had been able to meet twice yearly, and had developed and consolidated its working methods. As the body established to monitor the relevant international legal standards, the Committee would continue to work in order to ensure women's advancement and their full enjoyment of human rights. It acknowledged the support it had received from the Commission on Human Rights, and would continue to work cooperatively with the Commission and OHCHR to ensure that women and girls in the new century could take advantage of an integrated framework of human rights protection and promotion.

36. Mr. GUEYE (Senegal) said that the current review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action showed that relatively little progress had been made in promoting women's rights. As the Secretary-General had stated in his report (E/CN.6/2000/PC/2), the decade of the 1990s had been characterized by profound political, social and economic changes, many of which had impacted negatively on women. Vigorous measures must be adopted to promote and protect the rights of women through the effective application of all the relevant human rights instruments, and, in particular, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

37. National Governments had the primary responsibility for implementing the conclusions and recommendations of the Beijing Conference. His own Government had, to the extent to which it was able, made every effort to implement a national policy for the promotion and protection of women's rights. Senegal had ratified the main international human rights instruments, including the Convention, and had been one of the first countries to sign the Optional Protocol. The process of harmonizing domestic legislation with the provisions of the Convention was in course and Senegal was endeavouring to improve women's access to all professions, strengthen the principle of gender equality in its Constitution and promote the activities of women's organizations.

38. Under a recent law, female genital mutilation had been criminalized. Information campaigns had been conducted, and the practice had been forsworn in many villages. It would take time, but he was optimistic that that harmful practice would eventually be eliminated.

39. The political will to translate into reality the commitments undertaken in Beijing five years previously did exist. National institutional mechanisms would be improved so as to take account of the gender dimension in all aspects of national policy. His Government was determined to continue and strengthen its training programme and remained committed to the fight against poverty and its feminization. Nevertheless, much remained to be done to make the principle of equality between the sexes a reality, and resources must be mobilized to finance ambitious national plans. He was confident that the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly would take due account of all the constraints, with a view to accelerating implementation of the Platform for Action.

40. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that the Constitution of Bangladesh guaranteed women the right to equality. Macroeconomic strategy was designed to address specific women-related problems and policy was directed towards mainstreaming such problems into socio-economic and political activities. As a result, society in Bangladesh was being rapidly transformed and modernized. Women were at the forefront of many income-generating

activities and demonstrated that, given the opportunity, they were only too ready to enjoy their rights. He was proud to say that some of the highest offices in the land were occupied by women.

41. A national action plan had been established to monitor, coordinate and facilitate women's development programmes. Education for girls was a high priority and was free to grade 9. At national and local levels, programmes had been launched with a view to enhancing the nutritional and health standards of women and expanding their employment opportunities. A percentage of positions in public institutions was reserved for women. A large number of NGOs were making excellent contributions to women-related matters.

42. To protect women from violence, a set of legal and administrative measures had been introduced. Bangladesh had been, until very recently, a traditional society, and changes of such magnitude occasionally provoked intolerance or violence, but such reactions were not socially acceptable. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women had been invited to visit Bangladesh, and it was expected that a constructive dialogue would be held with her.

43. His delegation had played a key role in formulating the draft SAARC convention on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children for prostitution. He welcomed the current negotiations on the elaboration of a convention against transnational crime and the proposed protocols thereto, and, in particular, the protocol to prevent trafficking in persons. He hoped that those and related issues would be appropriately addressed at the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly.

44. Mr. GARCIA GONZALEZ (El Salvador), having endorsed the statement by the observer for Panama on behalf of the Central American Group, said that his Government had demonstrated the importance it attached to implementing the Nairobi and Beijing commitments, and had given the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development (ISDEMU) responsibility for coordinating, evaluating and implementing the national policy. One of the most important strategic objectives of that national policy was the elimination of violence against women. In that regard, a number of steps had been taken, including advertising campaigns, the provision of permanently available support through a family relations programme, a free telephone helpline available 24 hours a day and every day of the year, training programmes for health, police and other personnel in dealing with victims of domestic violence or sexual attacks, and the adoption of laws for the protection of the victims of domestic violence.

45. El Salvador had ratified the relevant international and regional conventions, and would probably sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the near future.

46. His delegation attached great importance to the preparatory work carried out by the Commission on the Status of Women in its capacity as the preparatory committee for the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly. It had thus much appreciated the statement made by the Chairperson of that Commission. It also appreciated the report presented by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (E/CN.4/2000/68). He noted with

satisfaction the support given by the international community to the revitalization of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and hoped that the Institute would be allocated the resources needed for its work.

47. The special session would provide an opportunity to reflect on practical ways of achieving the objectives and implementing the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Commission on Human Rights had an important part to play, not only in promoting the integration of women's rights, but also as a forum in which gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century could be actively promoted. It was therefore essential that the Commission should be closely involved in the follow-up to Beijing + 5.

48. Mrs. NASCIMBENE DE DUMONT (Argentina) said that violence was one of the most flagrant violations of women's human rights and posed a permanent obstacle to women's development. All States must therefore work to eliminate such violence, which could take many different forms.

49. Her Government had done much to improve the status of women, and, with the constitutional reform of 1994, various human rights instruments had been incorporated into the Constitution. Any practices detrimental to the improvement of women's social and legal status were thus unconstitutional.

50. Domestic violence was one of the most common violations of women's human rights. That problem was being addressed at every level of Argentinian society. Legislation on domestic violence allowed victims to seek redress for and protection against such violence. An interdisciplinary body of professionals provided technical assistance, and information and help centres had been set up to provide help in combating the problem.

51. Trafficking in women and children was addressed by several United Nations forums. Nevertheless, better coordination and more sustained action was required at the national, regional and international levels to deal with that crime. Her delegation was actively involved in drafting the relevant protocol. With regard to sexual abuse, her country's Penal Code had recently been amended so as to incorporate that concept and increase penalties for such crimes.

52. The work done by the National Council of Women in Argentina was inestimable. It had done much to promote a new kind of social contract based on the full and equal participation of women in political, economic and cultural life. With a view to making new policies more effective, the Council sought to work with the widest possible range of organizations of civil society. Governments and societies alike must continue to build up families, communities and States in which the rights of women were fully respected, where women were not forced to endure any type of violence and where they were able to play a full and effective part in the decision-making process and in planning for the future.

53. Mr. RAMCHARAN (Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) wished to place on record a number of observations with regard to the comments of the Cuban authorities contained in document E/CN.4/2000/131. First of all, OHCHR maintained scrupulous objectivity with regard to all Member States, including Cuba. Secondly, OHCHR considered that the staff member

named in the Cuban note had acted in good faith and with integrity. Thirdly, the report of the Special Rapporteur contained many sections favourable to the Cuban authorities, thereby bearing out the objectivity of the Special Rapporteur and her staff. Fourthly, the acquisition and use of internal correspondence in the manner demonstrated in the Cuban comments raised issues of principle and propriety that called for further examination. OHCHR had sought legal advice on the matter from the Office of Legal Affairs, which had been shared with the Permanent Mission of Cuba.

54. Mr. TANDAR (Observer for Afghanistan) said that, before the military occupation of Kabul by the Taliban in September 1996, the situation of women in Afghanistan had been steadily improving over the years. With the advent of the Taliban, however, their lives had turned into a nightmare. Thousands had been forced to leave school or university. Female teachers at mixed schools had had to leave their jobs. Access to hospitals had been barred, even though the infant and maternal mortality rate was one of the highest in the world. Public baths for women had been closed, although their towns had no running water. Women were confined to their homes and had to wear the chador. If they infringed any rule, they received a public beating. A law had been passed banning drivers from carrying women passengers who were not wearing a chador. Other laws forbade women to wash clothes in rivers and tailors to make women's clothes.

55. All such action was taken on political and ideological grounds. The head of the Taliban had recently said that women belonged in the home. They were weak and vulnerable to temptation; if allowed out of the house unsupervised they would seek to satisfy their desires. Working among men was the first step to prostitution. Another leader had said that, whereas elsewhere women were forced to work, in Afghanistan they stayed at home and were served by men. God had ordained that they should stay at home; requiring them to work was an attack on their rights.

56. He urged the international community to help the millions of Afghan women for whom the extremism and fanaticism of the Taliban had made life unbearable. The Taliban should be made to understand that there was no place in the community of nations for those who violated women's rights.

57. Mr. Jakubowski (Poland), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

58. Ms. VILLALOBOS (Chile) said that the Optional Protocol - of which Chile had been the first signatory - was the latest in the series of instruments to promote and protect women's human rights. The international community must, however, continue to be vigilant, since there were still serious obstacles to be overcome. Her delegation was actively committed to mainstreaming the gender perspective into all United Nations activities and would be submitting a draft resolution to that effect.

59. The ultimate responsibility for eliminating discrimination against women lay with Governments. Democratic Governments in Chile over the past decade had assumed that responsibility. The National Women's Service, which promoted equal rights and opportunities for men and women through intersectoral coordination and developed special programmes for priority groups, had been established in 1991. The current Government had strongly encouraged

participation by women in public decision-making: women ministers made up a third of the cabinet, holding the portfolios of Foreign Affairs, Health, Education, Planning and the National Women's Service. Similar proportions of posts at under-secretary level and of heads of administration in regional governments were occupied by women.

60. Equality between men and women had been made explicit by the Constitution and it had thus become possible to resort to the law in cases of discrimination. In 1995, the first law on domestic violence had been passed, relating to any ill-treatment affecting the physical or mental health of the victim. In 1998, legislation had been adopted recognizing the legal equality of children born in and out of wedlock, thus ending the legal discrimination against "illegitimate" children and acknowledging the existence of different types of family.

61. Ms. RYAN (United States of America) said that the NGO community, of which she was an active member, did not always agree with the Government, but the nature of the interaction benefited both parties.

62. The creation of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights had been an important step forward in strengthening the United Nations human rights machinery. With better fact-finding and reporting mechanisms, however, the High Commissioner could address human rights violations more quickly, thus potentially preventing violent conflicts and massive human rights failures. Many believed that a greater share of the United Nations budget should be allocated to investigators in the special mechanisms and treaty bodies, who were often best situated to identify impending crises.

63. Such matters were of particular importance to women, because their specific needs were often neglected in times of conflict. Indeed, women and children made up some 80 per cent of the world's 30 million refugees. The lesson had been learned that the promotion and protection of women's human rights must be central to both international and national approaches to development. Unfortunately, progress had been slow in many countries. Where women had begun to gain positions of influence, however, the laws and customs of their countries had begun to change, it was thus clear that democracy was essential to the realization of women's universal human rights.

64. Her delegation strongly condemned the violations of women's human rights in Afghanistan, where, although some small improvements had been made, most women were still prevented from working outside the home or from receiving most types of education. That country would never achieve its potential if half the population was kept in chains.

65. Another major challenge to the world community was how to stop harmful traditional practices. One of the worst was female genital mutilation, to which between 115 and 130 million women had been subjected, with some 2 million more at risk every year. Women in the affected countries must be helped to put an end to the practice and local NGOs campaigning against it must be supported.

66. "Honour killing" - when women were killed by relatives who accused them of bringing shame to the family - was another reprehensible traditional practice, yet many such killings escaped prosecution. Governments must accept their responsibility and recognize such murders for what they were.

67. Activists and Governments must also work together to halt the loathsome practice of trafficking in persons. Few countries were free from it and serious efforts should be made to combat the crime everywhere. Progress must be made on the draft international convention against organized transnational crime and the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

68. Nonetheless, the movement to implement women's right to vote kept growing. It was pleasing that Qatar had acknowledged women's right to vote and stand for office during the municipal council elections in 1999. The same had been proposed in Kuwait, but the effort had failed. The United States had close and friendly ties with other Gulf States and, in that context, her delegation urged Saudi Arabia to ease its restrictions on women. The benefits of doing so were very clear.

69. In her country the Government had sponsored a number of programmes to help women. One of the most important was the Vital Voices Initiative, a programme that brought women together all over the world and helped them learn skills. Another was the President's Directive on steps to combat violence against women and trafficking in women and girls, which had a three-tiered strategy of prevention, protection and prosecution. Domestic violence laws were being strengthened at the local, state and federal level; funding was also being provided for multi-disciplinary programmes addressing domestic violence in the former Soviet Union, Central Europe and South Asia. Other programmes supported locally initiated women's health projects to raise awareness concerning female genital mutilation in a number of countries where it was practised.

70. Mr. Simkhada (Nepal) resumed the Chair.

71. Mrs. RUSTAM (Indonesia) said that significant progress had been made in the protection and promotion of women's rights in her country. Her Government strongly supported mainstreaming of the gender perspective and welcomed the OHCHR initiatives particularly its cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women. Such cooperation should be extended to other relevant bodies of the United Nations system.

72. In that connection, she drew attention to the need for all United Nations bodies, especially the treaty bodies, to achieve equitable gender representation. Women were totally absent from some committees. Equal representation should be achieved and gender training provided for members of the treaty bodies. With regard to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, her delegation had always maintained that reservations should not be allowed to impede the implementation of such important legal instruments. She added that her Government had recently signed the Optional Protocol.

73. The events of recent years had brought about considerable progress towards a more transparent and participatory democratic Government in her country. As in most periods of uncertainty and transition, however, there had been problems, including human rights abuses. The Government was launching numerous initiatives to promote and safeguard the rights and well-being of women. It would investigate all allegations of abuse of their rights and would uphold the rule of law.

74. In November 1999, it had adopted a National Action Plan to implement its "zero tolerance" policy on violence against women. That had been preceded, in October 1998, by the establishment of the National Commission on Violence against Women, established by presidential decree in the aftermath of the May 1998 riots. A fact-finding team had also been established to investigate incidents of violence against women, including rape, at that time.

75. Women judges were to be appointed to preside over cases involving violence against women, including rape. Police stations in several provinces had established special units, partially staffed by women officers, to process information on violence against women. Legal aid agencies were also becoming more aware of women's needs.

76. The Government would shortly be forming a national task force, made up of the National Commission on Violence against Women, the National Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and representatives from the Government, parliament, the media and NGOs, to follow up the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

77. Mrs. MBONU (Nigeria) said that it had been heartening to hear the statements by government representatives at the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on their countries' achievements in enhancing women's rights as a result of the Beijing Platform for Action. The areas of progress included healthier living, greater access to good nutrition, higher employment, greater awareness at national level of women's rights and the designation of rape in conflict situations as a war crime. The special session of the General Assembly would take the process a step further forward.

78. There had been a number of achievements in her country. With the establishment of the federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, gender perspectives had been incorporated into all aspects of national life. The Ministry had been most active. Gender and development advocacy programmes had been introduced, targeted at policy-makers, legislators, traditional and religious leaders, law-enforcement officials, women and young people; a baseline country survey on harmful traditional practices had been conducted. There had been a substantial reduction in such practices, owing to the campaign by the Ministry and relevant NGOs. A workshop on violence against women had been held in 1999 to educate law practitioners on issues arising from the tripartite system of laws. A national workshop for female opinion-moulders, NGOs and other stakeholders had also been organized to educate them on their human rights. A campaign to sensitize the community to the need to educate the girl child, especially in rural areas, was under way.

79. It was regrettable that, despite the efforts made by the developing countries to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, obstacles still existed. Globalization could generate greater wealth, but in practice it widened the gap between the poor and the rich, most of the victims being women and children living in developing countries.

80. Another challenge facing women from developing countries was the HIV/AIDS epidemic, since women were twice as likely as men to fall victim to the disease. Only partnership and cooperation between the developing and developed countries could control the tragedy, to which many African women of productive age were falling victim. The reduction of infant and maternal mortality was being wiped out by the effects of the epidemic.

81. All Nigerian citizens were guaranteed equal treatment under the law and special affirmative measures had been adopted to promote the empowerment of women. Women had always played an active role at all levels of political decision-making in her country.

82. Regrettably, women throughout the world continued to face discrimination and violence, such as trafficking, marital rape and harmful traditional and cultural practices such as the disinheriting of female children, the forceful inheritance of a widow by the husband's relatives, and the denial of education to girl children. At the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly, political will would be required on the part of Governments to identify achievable goals which would make a difference in the lives of women everywhere. The participation of NGOs would also be crucial.

83. Mr. LEPATAN (Philippines) said he welcomed the appointment of a special representative of the High Commissioner on trafficking in Asia. The report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2000/66) revealed the strength of international and regional commitment to addressing the problem of trafficking in women and girls. It also revealed the magnitude of the challenges ahead. Root causes, including economic and developmental aspects, must be addressed, or else there would always be a pool of victims waiting to be exploited in the slums of the world, and in conflict zones.

84. A recent meeting of the Asian Regional Initiative Against Trafficking in Women and Girls (ARIAT) in Manila had identified four strategic areas for action, namely, prevention, protection, prosecution and repatriation, and reintegration of victims. A combination of approaches might prove necessary (developmental, rule of law, crime prevention, humanitarian and human rights approaches), hence the importance of coordination at all levels. The efforts of OHCHR in that regard were most welcome. Above all, it was crucial not to lose sight of the trafficked person in elaborating approaches to the issue.

85. Mr. MULONDA (Zambia), commending the efforts of the United Nations to mainstream a gender perspective, said that the full enjoyment of human rights by women and girls was a priority for his Government. It had implemented a range of affirmative and other measures to redress gender imbalances. The Zambian Constitution guaranteed the rights and freedoms of all persons, regardless of sex. Pending a systematic review of discriminatory legislation, the Government had instituted a national gender policy which incorporated gender perspectives in the education, science, trade and industry sectors. Gender mainstreaming in national policies and programmes had yet, however, to achieve the desired level.

86. Despite appropriate penal provisions, gender violence in Zambia was a long-standing problem. The Government had accordingly established a victim support unit under police auspices, and NGOs ran shelters for battered women and abused children, and counselling services for the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. At the institutional level, a number of government mechanisms were responsible for gender mainstreaming and the prioritization of women's rights. The Government also continued to promote an enabling environment for women's organizations.

87. Mr. EL TALIB (Sudan) said that school curricula in his country reflected the significant role played by women in the history of the Sudan, including in the liberation from colonial

powers. Since the early days of independence, women had had the right to vote, and their participation in the country's economic, social, cultural and political development had been guaranteed. Since the 1980s, 25 per cent of all seats in local and regional councils and at the national level had been allocated to them.

88. The Sudanese Constitution provided that the State would emancipate women from injustice in all spheres, and encourage their role in the family and in public life. It also guaranteed their right to equality. The participation and status of women was further promoted by means of a comprehensive national strategy.

89. Women in the Sudan exercised their right to property and wealth. They were also eligible for nomination to public posts, including the presidency. In some government ministries, more than 50 per cent of the civil servants were female, including some very senior posts. Moreover, one woman was a judge of the Supreme Court and two women had reached the rank of ambassador. Women accounted for 62 per cent of the university students, and many were joining the teaching profession. Sudanese women also participated actively in voluntary work and in civil society: the Federation of Sudanese women had 12,000 affiliates throughout the country. The national commission for the eradication of traditional harmful practices was targeting, inter alia, female genital mutilation.

90. In the areas of armed conflict of the southern Sudan which were under rebel control, the situation of women was precarious. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) engaged in abductions, rape and enforced displacement of women and systematically violated human rights by shelling the civilian population, using anti-personnel landmines and subjecting women and children to forced labour and other forms of ill-treatment. Civilians were also used as human shields and humanitarian aid was diverted. The activities of NGOs in rebel-controlled areas had also been restricted. Despite his Government's efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement to the conflict, civilians continued to suffer. The international community should thus apply pressure on SPLA to accept a comprehensive ceasefire.

91. Mr. AMAT FORÉS (Cuba) said that, in view of his Government's comments (E/CN.4/2000/131) on the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women on her mission to Cuba (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.2) and particularly the points made regarding the "manipulation" of the Special Rapporteur's visit, the Secretariat should open an inquiry. The comments by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights had not served to clarify the matter. Honest and transparent action was accredited in deeds, not words. The manipulation evident in the report clearly ran counter to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

92. Mr. BORISOVAS (Observer for Lithuania), having endorsed the statement by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union, said that Lithuania was a party to many international instruments for the protection of women's human rights. A National Action Plan for the implementation of the Beijing goals was currently in its second phase, the first phase having been successfully completed. Moreover, a law on equal opportunities had entered into force on 1 March 1999 and its implementation was monitored by an ombudsman and a national equal opportunities office. In 1999, the number of Lithuanian NGOs dealing with gender issues had increased to 63. One such organization collected and analysed gender disaggregated data in a number of fields.

93. Domestic violence and sexual abuse were extremely sensitive issues which were being addressed by State institutions in cooperation with NGOs. One priority had been to introduce preventive measures in police stations. A programme for training police officials to deal with family conflict had recently been launched with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and 11 crisis centres had been established to provide assistance to female victims of violence. Police stations also had telephone hotlines for abused women.

94. Legislation was being prepared to control prostitution and trafficking in persons and to regulate the dissemination of erotic and violent publications. The forthcoming special session of the General Assembly would provide an opportunity to reaffirm his Government's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and to pledge further action at the national level.

95. Ms. ABREU DE POLANCO (Observer for the Dominican Republic), stressing the importance of national measures to implement the Beijing goals, said that her Government had accordingly made some significant changes to the Criminal Code whereby violence against women, including domestic violence, was criminalized. A government infrastructure had also been established to address violence against women by providing psychological support to women and children of limited economic means whose rights had been violated. There was also a national committee dealing with domestic violence on which both government bodies and NGOs were represented.

96. Her Government welcomed the restructuring of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which should maintain its headquarters in the Dominican Republic and be accorded sufficient resources, in view of its importance for the advancement of women in developing countries.

97. Mr. HEINEMANN (Observer for the Netherlands), strongly condemning "honour killings", said that States must introduce appropriate legislation and prosecute the perpetrators. Despite a host of instruments and good intentions, many women and girls throughout the world continued to be subjected to atrocious forms of violence and to harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation. It was time to move from eloquent words to action to ensure that women's human rights were fully honoured everywhere. The special session of the General Assembly would provide an appropriate occasion for stocktaking.

98. He was pleased to announce that the Netherlands would ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in early 2001.

The meeting rose at 1.00 p.m.